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July 22, 1982

TO: ACDA - Mr. Rostow
P - Mr. Eagleburger

FROM: PA - Dean E. Fischer

SUBJECT: Support for Freeze Melts When Confronted
By Likelihood of Soviet Nuclear Superiority

SUMMARY:

Various polls have shown that much of the support for an immediate nuclear freeze is "soft." Half of those who initially say they favor the idea of an immediate freeze then say they oppose a freeze that would leave the U.S. even "somewhat" behind the USSR in nuclear strength. "Soft" pro-freezers who change their minds in this way comprise nearly two-fifths of the total public.

Furthermore, the public's predominant perception that the U.S. is behind the USSR in nuclear military strength enhances support for a freeze-when-equal nuclear arms accord, rather than an immediate freeze.

END SUMMARY

Concern About Soviet Superiority Generates Anti-Freeze Majority

Several polls have revealed that nearly two-fifths of the public changes its opinion from initially favoring the idea of a nuclear freeze to opposing a freeze proposal that leaves the U.S. weaker than the USSR in nuclear military strength. This causes a near-reversal of opinion from a roughly 70-to-20 percent majority supporting the freeze idea to about a 30-to-60 percent majority opposing a freeze that leaves the U.S. weaker than the USSR.

Data from a CBS/New York Times poll, conducted in May, shows how these "soft" pro-freezers are torn between their desire for a freeze and their unwillingness to accept Soviet nuclear superiority. In response to a question, two-thirds of those polled by CBS responded that, since the U.S. and the USSR both have "so much" nuclear strength, "it doesn't matter which one has more." But 55 percent of these respondents (comprising 37% of the total sample), despite maintaining that nuclear superiority "doesn't matter," opposed a nuclear freeze that left the Soviets with "somewhat greater nuclear strength than the U.S." Thus, nearly two-fifths of the total public (1) claimed nuclear superiority "doesn't matter" but (2) opposed a nuclear freeze that left the Soviets "somewhat" superior in nuclear arms capability.

State Dept. review completed

Public Prefers Freeze-When-Equal

A Roper poll, conducted during April-May, presented respondents with several alternative agreements between the U.S. and USSR on "nuclear arms production." A plurality (45%) preferred an agreement requiring the Soviets to cut back -- or permitting the U.S. to build up -- to nuclear arms parity. A sizably smaller group, 26 percent, preferred an immediate freeze even if that meant the USSR would have "somewhat more nuclear arms" than the U.S. An even smaller group, totaling 19 percent, either opposed any nuclear freeze agreement (11%) or favored a freeze only after the U.S. achieved nuclear military superiority over the Soviet Union (8%). Roper's question:

"Nearly everyone would like to see a reduction in nuclear warfare tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. The only disagreement is over how to reach it. Which one of these agreements on nuclear arms production would you most like to see the U.S. come to with Russia?" (SHOW CARD TO RESPONDENTS)

"Freeze production now on all nuclear arms at their present levels, even if that means that Russia will have somewhat more nuclear arms than we do" 26%

"Freeze production of all nuclear arms if Russia will agree to cut back to equal nuclear capability" 32

45%

"Freeze production of all nuclear arms when the U.S. builds up to Russia's nuclear capability" 13

"Freeze production of all nuclear arms when the U.S. achieves a greater nuclear capability than Russia" 8

* "Impose no freeze on the production of nuclear arms by either the U.S. or Russia." 11

19%

Don't know 10

Public Tends to Perceive U.S. Behind USSR in Nuclear Forces

Roper also found that a plurality of the public (41%) continues to view the U.S. as being weaker than the USSR in "nuclear military strength." Only 12 percent perceive the U.S. as being stronger and 32 percent view the two powers as "about even" in nuclear forces. The predominant perception of U.S. nuclear arms strength changed from "about even" with the USSR to "behind" the USSR between 1979 and 1980. It has remained that way, according to subsequent polls:

"At the present time, do you think the United States is ahead of Russia in terms of nuclear arms capability, about even with them, or behind Russia in nuclear military strength?"

United States Is:

	<u>Behind</u>	<u>About Even</u>	<u>Ahead</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
April-May 1982	→41%	32%	12%	15%
October, 1980	43	29	15	13
January, 1979	31	38	18	13
November, 1977	28	38	18	16

Perception of U.S. Weakness Reduces Support for Freeze

Those who perceive the U.S. as weaker than the USSR in nuclear military power are less likely to support an immediate nuclear freeze than those who perceive the U.S. as about equal or stronger. An immediate freeze was favored by only 21 percent of those who saw the U.S. as weaker than the USSR. On the other hand, an immediate freeze was favored by 32 percent of those who perceived the U.S. as about equal and 29 percent of those who perceived the U.S. ahead:

Perception of Comparative U.S. Nuclear Military Strength

	<u>U.S. Behind USSR</u> (41% of Public)	<u>U.S. About Even</u> (32%)	<u>U.S. Ahead</u> (12%)
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Preference Re
Nuclear Freeze:

Immediate Freeze	21%	32%	29%
Freeze-When-Equal	49	46	35
Freeze-When-Superior	10	7	9
Never Freeze	13	9	15
Don't Know	7	6	12

Roper found that Republicans, conservatives, Southerners, rural residents, and those not having a college education are the population groups most inclined to perceive the U.S. as behind the USSR in nuclear forces. These are the groups least inclined to favor an immediate freeze "at present levels." The college-educated, liberals, Northeasterners and those living in the largest metropolitan centers are least inclined to perceive the U.S. behind in nuclear forces. These are the groups most inclined to favor an immediate freeze.

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